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Opening Statement at African Diplomatic Briefing

*U.S. Rep. Chris Smith
Chairman of the House Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights
and Int'l Organizations Subcommittee
Excerpts of Remarks
July 24, 2013*

Good afternoon. Welcome to this special African diplomatic briefing on security issues.

Over the last two-and-a-half years, our Subcommittee has held a dozen hearings on the issues our witnesses will discuss today: terrorism, drugs and international crime and piracy. We have found that these are issues that not only plague the continent of Africa, but also the global economy and global security. Therefore, these issues are of vital interest to the United States.

We have seen in our hearings the devastation that homegrown terrorist groups have visited on their countries. Boko Haram in Nigeria has left hundreds of dead Christians and Muslims in their wake – even before elements of this group joined the jihadist movement led by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb. Now Boko Haram is operating in Mali and Cameroon.

Similarly, al-Shabaab, the radical Islamist group in Somalia, has fought both the Somali government and international peacekeepers and terrorized their own people. This group even made worse a disastrous drought in 2011 by preventing humanitarian aid from reaching those

most in need. Now this group has become more globally jihadist and is yet another al-Qaeda affiliate.

Two years ago, we heard about the impact of Somali piracy on shipping along the East African coast. One witness told us that \$6.6 to \$6.9 billion a year in global trade is negatively affected by East African piracy – from Somalia to the Tanzanian coast. Now we have witnessed the rise of piracy in West Africa's Gulf of Guinea – home to billions of dollars in oil trade. This region has now become the scene of the most incidents of piracy in the world.

Piracy in East and West Africa differ in that East African piracy has a strong kidnapping for ransom angle, while West African pirates are more interested in capturing cargo and usually release hostages in seven to 10 days. Nevertheless, there have been deaths involved in West African piracy, and more mayhem is inevitable as this region has become the world's most dangerous.

In recent years, we have witnessed Guinea Bissau become Africa's first narco-state – a government dominated by drug lords. Unfortunately, the influence of the drug trade is not confined to one weak government. Drug trafficking produces an estimated \$400 billion annually. The amount of money it generates makes it easy to bribe officials who are poorly or even sporadically paid. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb has shifted its criminal operations from a focus on ransom of kidnap victims to the drug trade, and it is not only funding terrorist operations in the Sahel and West Africa, but also subverting even stable governments and drawing in disaffected youth.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, heroin (mostly from Afghanistan with a bit from Pakistan) moves into Ethiopia and Kenya and on to Sierra Leone,

Liberia and Nigeria. Cocaine (largely from Columbia, Bolivia and Peru) moves through Equatorial Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire Sierra Leone and Senegal. A Congressional staff visit to Zambia two years ago revealed that the drug trade leaves behind it more crime and more broken lives.

As I said earlier, we have held hearings at which numerous government and private experts have testified about these issues and helped us to form an opinion on which action to take to address the challenges we face. Today, we will hear directly from the ambassadors of countries facing these issues. Ambassador Somduth Soburun of Mauritius will provide an opening overview of these issues. Ambassador Soburun has worked with us previously on the House-Senate African Subcommittee-African diplomatic corps engagements, as well as on the extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

Mali Ambassador Al-Maamoon Keita will discuss terrorism, which has struck his country most cruelly. Ambassador Keita has been in regular touch with us even before the 2012 coup in Mali, and we have benefitted from his insight into the troubling situation his country continues to address.

Zambia Ambassador Palan Mulonda will detail for us the crisis the drug trade and international crime have caused in his country and Africa generally. This is our first time hearing from the ambassador, and we welcome him to working with us in the future.

Finally, we have Gabon Ambassador Michael Moussa-Adamo will discuss piracy's impact, especially on West African oil producers such as his country. We have met with Ambassador Adamo and have maintained contact with him on various issues.

We thank all four of our diplomatic presenters today for their time and look forward to hearing their views on some of the most important issues facing Africa today.